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Taken into custody: girls and convent guardianship in Renaissance Florence

SHARON T. STROCCHIA

'I must tell you that there is a stench in this house,' Archbishop Cosimo Pazzi scathingly informed the Benedictine nuns of San Luca when he visited their convent in March 1509.¹ During his pastoral rounds, Pazzi uncovered a web of interwoven problems at San Luca. His report noted, for example, the failure of male clerics to discharge their duties of *cura monialium*; the 'impossible poverty' in which many Italian nuns of the time were forced to live, with insufficient income to meet the daily needs of its forty-three residents; and the commingling of lay and monastic worlds typified by the presence of four secular girls living in the house as boarders.² While the archbishop offered considerable pastoral advice, the only practical remedy he proposed was to ban additional inhabitants. Fearing an untenable strain on monastic resources, Pazzi ordered the nuns not to admit even one more servant, nun, or boarder without his express permission, under pain of excommunication. Despite the severe penalty for violation, the nuns of San Luca nonetheless

¹ Archivio Arcivescovile, Florence (hereafter abbreviated as AAF). Visite Pastoralis (= VP).03.1, fasc. 2, unfoliated: 'pure non mancheremo di dirvi come di questo vostro monastero havemo uno cattivo odore'. Throughout this document Pazzi used the plural when referring to himself and his office. Pazzi visited sixteen female religious communities, affiliated mainly with the Benedictines and Augustinians, between February and April 1509. San Luca was the tenth house scrutinized, on 14 March 1509. O. Fantozzi Micali and P. Roselli, *Le Soppressioni dei conventi a Firenze: Riuso e trasformazioni dal secolo XVIII in poi* (Florence, 1980), 181, gives the monastic affiliation of San Luca as Augustinian, but the visitation record clearly states that the nuns followed the rule of St Benedict. By the 1570s, however, the convent had shifted its affiliation to the Augustinians; Monastero di San Luca, vol. 78, fol. 183'. Although Pazzi had female kin in the city's oldest convent, San Pier Maggiore, he did not have a family interest in San Luca. The Florentine year began on March 25. I have modernized all dates in the text and notes. Translations are my own unless noted otherwise.

² The phrase 'impossible poverty' is borrowed from a forthcoming work by S. Evangelisti. The 1509 visitation record claimed a total of forty-three *bocche* at San Luca, which included thirty-eight nuns, novices, and servants, and one *fattore*. However, the list of inhabitants identified by name totalled only thirty-seven persons: twenty professed nuns ('professe'), six who had not yet taken final vows ('velate non professe'), two novices ('della zazerina e non vestite'), and nine servants ('serve'). The four girls living in *serbanza* were not named in the report. AAF, VP.03.1, fasc. 2, unfoliated. On the problem of strained finances in female monastic communities across Italy, see G. Zarri (ed.), *Il monachesimo femminile in Italia dall'alto medioevo al secolo XVII a confronto con l'oggi* (Verona, 1997). P. D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago and London, 1991), argues for a correlation in thirteenth-century France between prosperity and permeable cloister on one hand, and poverty and monastic disarray on the other.

accepted at least thirty-five new boarders over the next decade, few with ecclesiastical license.³

It would be easy to frame this episode in one of two ways: either in an older historiographical mode, as yet another instance of monastic decadence rampant before Trent; or, in a more contemporary feminist vein, as a sign of resistance by feisty religious women bent on self-determination. Neither analysis, however, would capture adequately the complex structural problems that plagued Italian convents by the early sixteenth century, especially with regard to what might be called 'the problem of numbers'.⁴ By 1500, the problem of numbers permeated virtually every aspect of convent life. At the heart of this problem lay the monastic explosion of the late fifteenth century that produced a yawning gap between too many nuns, many of whom lived exceptionally long lives, and too little income and physical space to house them.⁵ The problem of numbers highlighted the tensions between the disparate functions assigned to convents, as well as the lack of consensus about the nature and purpose of female monasticism. This problem not only conditioned strategies used by religious women in dealing with outsiders; it also forced nuns to reorganize long-standing forms of communal life and to expand their social roles as guardians of young girls.

This essay examines how the problem of numbers impacted on the widespread social practice of placing girls in the temporary care of convents (known as *serbanza*) in the turbulent half century from 1480 to 1530. Guardianship, whether for custodial or educational purposes, became one of the most important social services rendered by female religious communities in

³ Archivio di Stato, Florence (hereafter abbreviated when necessary as ASF. All archival references are to this depository unless noted otherwise.) This information is culled for the years 1509–19 from Monastero di San Luca, vols 1, 2, and 29, none of which contains a complete serial run for that decade. Vol. 1 documents the acceptance of sixteen girls in *serbanza* between May 1509 and February 1514, when accounts abruptly ceased. Vol. 29 records five boarders in the years 1513–14 only, leaving a documentary gap for 1515–16 in both volumes. Vol. 2 adds the names of another five boarders for 1516–18 only. Vol. 1 continues the accounts; between January 1517 and August 1519, the convent accepted nine boarders, all of who entered with the license of Messer Averano Giugni, a canon of Santa Maria del Fiore and convent procurator.

⁴ Although this phrase is my own, the fundamental statement of this problem remains G. Zarri, 'Monasteri femminili e città', reprinted in *Recinti. Donne, clausura e matrimonio nella prima età moderna* (Bologna, 2000), 43–143.

⁵ The phenomenon of monastic expansion was first noted by R. C. Trexler, 'Celibacy in the Renaissance: the nuns of Florence', reprinted in his *The Women of Renaissance Florence: Power and Dependence in Renaissance Florence* (Binghamton, NY, 1993), II, 6–30. More detailed census figures for both male and female religious are provided by G. Brucker, 'Monasteries, friaries, and nunneries in Quattrocento Florence', in T. Verdon and J. Henderson (eds), *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento* (Syracuse, NY, 1990), 41–62. On the complex patterns linking rising dowries, monastic expansion, and the marriage patterns of the Florentine elite, see A. Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge, MA, 1994). J. C. Brown, 'Monache a Firenze all'inizio dell'età moderna. Un'analisi demografica', *Quaderni storici*, 85 (1994), 117–52, argues that Florentine nuns in subsequent centuries had longer life expectancies than laywomen. In several instances Pazzi's visitation record explicitly noted the spatial squeeze caused by growing numbers of nuns. Pazzi barred any new entrants into the convent of the Chiarito because, as he remarked, 'siete troppe a questo piccolo luogo'. Similarly, the nuns of the Paradiso were unable to provide the single cells prescribed by their rule due to spatial constraints. AAF, VP.03.1, fasc. 2, 3.

Renaissance Florence. Prior to the development of large-scale custodial institutions in Florence after 1550, *serbanza* was the major form of extrafamilial care for girls of the middling, artisan classes as well as for the vulnerable rich. In the fifteenth century, convents provided an important complement to republican custodial institutions like the Ospedale degli Innocenti. Yet, unlike the care offered by hospitals or foundling homes, convent guardianship was a gendered experience that had no exact counterpart in the upbringing or socialization of young Florentine boys.⁶

Using the convent of San Luca as the central reference point, I investigate some of the complex issues at stake in this practice for individual women, religious communities, church and communal officials, and the urban social order. The first section of the essay looks at changing patterns of guardianship between 1480 and 1530, and considers their social implications for boarders and the religious communities that housed them. I argue that convent boarding provided an institutional foundation for a shared female culture that cut across conventional groupings of neighbourhood, class, marital and religious status, and generations. At the same time that convents introduced girls to particular habits and values, they also initiated them into the experience of constructed community that would mark the rest of their lives. The second part of the essay examines the socioeconomic importance of boarding practices for convents, and considers the issues raised for internal monastic governance and ecclesiastical supervision. While reformers railed against secular dangers in the midst of religious life, nuns had to manage the complex, day-to-day problems of securing patronage and mentoring new recruits. The essay aims to enlarge our perspective on both the lived experience of Florentine girls and the role of convents as custodial institutions before guardianship merged with the instruments of state under the Medici dukes.

I

The practice of *serbanza* was by no means new in the early Cinquecento. Indeed, the very continuity of convents as custodial institutions throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries documents the importance of their

⁶ While hospitals and orphanages sheltered abandoned children of both sexes, these institutions had a decidedly different focus and infrastructure than convents. Young boys might be given to monasteries and friaries as oblates, but they were intended for the religious life rather than for temporary custody. Similarly, boys apprenticed to workshops or masters were subject to the discipline of work and household, but not to an all-encompassing communal environment. I have found only one example of a boy being kept in *serbanza* in a female religious community. In 1503 the Dominican tertiaries of Annalena housed six-year old Giovanni di Giovanni de' Medici (later called 'delle Bande Nere') for eight months; he was the nephew of the convent's chief benefactor Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, and as an adult became the father of Duke Cosimo I. According to a later, undated account, the nuns lodged the boy and his servants in the founder's own rooms. *Manoscritti*, vol. 170, no. 3, fol. 57. A. Zucchi, 'Il monastero di Annalena in Firenze', *Memorie domenicane*, 68 (1951), 212–26, discusses varying interpretations of the degree to which these nuns endangered themselves by sheltering this Medici boy. Although female religious communities occasionally underwrote expenses for a male ward when his guardian was affiliated with the convent, these boys did not live a communal life.

caretaking services to the functioning of the urban social order. Although convents frequently stored valuables for parishioners and patrons during the crises of the late Trecento and beyond, placing girls in temporary guardianship became a popular practice only after 1400, when new waves of plague reshuffled Florentine households, and new concerns about marriage, honour, and demographic decline emerged in civic discourse.⁷ Widows making life provisions for their young daughters, fathers leaving the city for extended periods on communal or commercial business, and civic officials in charge of wards all availed themselves of these custodial arrangements.⁸

Serbanza was an attractive option for Florentine families for several reasons. It was relatively affordable, costing between ten and fourteen florins annually, roughly equal to the cost of living set by tax officials; by 1500 annual boarding fees escalated to about sixteen florins. Convents generally negotiated very flexible arrangements with families that accommodated different needs and circumstances. Boarding terms ranged from a few days (in rare instances) to several months or years. During most of the fifteenth century, the normative length of boarding tenures in the absence of serious crisis was one to three years, with girls entering guardianship in the general age range of seven to nine years old.⁹ Since many boarders were related to the nuns of a particular house, *serbanza* worked to reinforce ties of kinship and class among women of the Florentine elite. The most critical rationale for placing girls in *serbanza*, however, was to preserve both personal and family honour during moments of household disintegration, social crisis, or at other vulnerable points in a girl's life cycle. As Florentines became increasingly preoccupied with issues of honour and sexuality in the fifteenth century, the role of institutions dedicated to ideals of female celibacy expanded accordingly.

In many instances, guardianship interwove a rudimentary education in reading and sewing with lessons in moral virtue and modest deportment,

⁷ For example, the first documented instance of payment for *serbanza* at the Benedictine convent of San Pier Maggiore, whose records I have examined systematically from the mid-fourteenth century, dates to 26 October 1403, when the woolworker and parishioner Giovanni di (blank in Ms) Parigi paid twenty-four florins to board for an unspecified time the two daughters of the deceased Sandro di Piero Masini, with whom he shared an unknown relationship; San Pier Maggiore, vol. 52, fol. 30'. In most other instances, the girls taken into custody were related to one of the nuns. For instance, in January 1414 Monna Laudomina, widow of Carlo Strozzi, placed her daughter Bice in San Pier Maggiore, where the girl's aunt Jacopa was a nun; San Pier Maggiore, vol. 72, fols 18', 19'.

⁸ Pierpagolo Monti entrusted his daughters Lisabetta and Dianora to the care of the San Luca nuns in April 1503 'perche pieto pagolo loro padre ando a volterra capitano di cittadella'; Monastero di San Luca, vol. 29, fol. 72'. Similarly, Maddalena Salviati entered into *serbanza* for six months at San Pier Maggiore when her father Lorenzo became captain of Castracano in 1498; San Pier Maggiore, vol. 78, fol. 33'.

⁹ For boarding terms at Lapo and San Niccolò, see my article, 'Learning the virtues: convent schools and female culture in Renaissance Florence', in B. J. Whitehead (ed.), *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500–1800* (New York, 1999), 3–46, at 28–9. At San Luca, initial agreements usually specified one-year terms, to be prorated for the times girls spent with their families. Some terms, however, were open ended, to be determined or renewed as circumstances warranted. For example, Bartolomea di Filippo Ciampini, aged 'about twelve', was placed by her uncle Tommaso 'in deposito per quello tempo che piaccia a Tommaso di Martino sopradetto'; Monastero di San Luca, vol. 29, fol. 17, dated 19 December 1478.

although convents distinguished full-fledged pupils from more casual boarders with varying degrees of precision.¹⁰ Since women's education in fifteenth-century Italy revolved more around their moral than their intellectual formation, girls profited from exposure to nuns' self-effacing behaviours even in the absence of a formal curriculum. According to a communal provision of 1456, many Florentine citizens placed their young daughters with the Dominican tertiaries of San Vincenzo (more commonly known as the Annalena) to expose them explicitly to the 'good morals and devotion' of those religious women.¹¹ Girls lucky enough to be taught by highly educated nuns, like the Brescian humanist Laura Cereta, still absorbed the 'learning, habits, and discipline' of their religious mentors.¹² Still, the intellectual tools girls acquired during their boarding stints were not negligible, and the frequency of such practice speaks of a more widespread rudimentary education among girls than has been supposed. The young boarder Tommasa Sassoli obviously learned to write and count so well during her two-year stint at San Piero a Monticelli (1512–14) that she was able to continue the real estate accounts of her notary father after his death in *c.* 1530.¹³

Although the administrative blurring of pupils and boarders thwarts our ability to measure women's formal training, it was precisely this melding of educational and custodial activities, with their linked moral and intellectual goals, that helps explain the popularity of convents as repositories for female youth. It is important to note, however, that neither *serbanza* nor convent schooling were intended as trial periods in which prospective nuns might get a preview of monastic life. Only a tiny fraction of girls taken into custody or educated at convents became nuns. In most instances, the basic track of a girl's destiny had already been set upon entering a house, even if the particulars of their marriage arrangements were still pending.¹⁴

¹⁰ For convent schools, see Strocchia, 'Learning the virtues'. Zarri, *Recinti*, 156–9, assumes that guardianship entailed formal educational functions, citing for example the presence of books in a Bolognese convent intended for girls' primary education. While there was considerable overlap of these functions in Florentine convents, the documentary evidence points to a greater distinction in activities, fees, and institutional identities. For instance, the sisters Marietta and Brigida Pecori spent six months in *serbanza* in San Luca while their father Guidaccio was captain of Pistoia in 1511. Both girls then became pupils at San Niccolò dei Frieri in 1518; Monastero di San Luca, vol. 1, fol. 13; Corporazioni Religiose Soppresse dal Governo Francese (hereafter abbreviated as CRSGF).133, vol. 60, p. 28.

¹¹ G. Zippel, 'Le monache d'Annalena e il Savonarola', *Rivista d'Italia*, 4 (1901), 231–49. This communal provision, dated 16 June 1456, was intended to keep inns and taverns away from the convent, where many citizens 'ibi deponunt eorum filias puellas ut ab illis [sororibus] bonos mores et devotionem in earum teneris annis accipiant'.

¹² L. Cereta, *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*, ed. D. Robin (Chicago and London, 1997), 25.

¹³ This account book is inventoried as San Piero a Monticelli, vol. 216. Although the inventory entry states that Tommasa was the sister of the book's originator, the notary Francesco di Marco Sassoli, fol. 1' and other internal evidence document that she was his daughter. Tommasa's boarding accounts are found in vol. 25, fols 136', 144'; vol. 26, fol. 4'.

¹⁴ For example, only two of the thirty-three girls boarding at San Luca between 1465 and 1473 became nuns there; Monastero di San Luca, vol. 29. This point, corroborated by my evidence, is made by A. Molho, 'Tamquam vere mortua. Le professioni religiose femminili nella Firenze del tardo medioevo', *Società e storia*, 43 (1989), 1–44, at 16–7.

While all but the most stringent convents took in occasional boarders as a favour to one of their nuns or patrons, some communities specialized in custodial care as a critical source of income and social capital. By the time of Pazzi's visit in 1509, an informal urban geography of girls' conservatories was already emerging in the city and on its outskirts. Six of the sixteen houses Archbishop Pazzi surveyed engaged in custodial and/or educational activities to a significant degree.¹⁵ Although guardianship remained diffused throughout the city, discrete nodes of concentrated custodial activity developed in three main zones: in the northern sector on Via San Gallo, especially at the convents of San Luca, Sant'Appollonia, and Sant'Agata; on the southern edge, mainly at San Niccolò dei Frieri; and outside the walls, at Lapo, San Piero a Monticelli, San Martino al Prato, Santa Maria al Vergine, and Santa Maria Disciplina al Portico.¹⁶ Several of these institutions were transformed into full-fledged conservatories later in the early modern period, or became the institutional matrix from which other custodial foundations emerged.¹⁷ By contrast, the relative infrequency of boarders at the few convents that headed parishes – San Pier Maggiore, Sant'Ambrogio, and Santa Felicità – indicates that guardianship did not figure among the nuns' informal parochial duties.¹⁸ Instead, these convents rested not only on larger endowments but also on stronger, more diversified social and economic foundations.

The practice of *serbanza* both responded to the problem of numbers and compounded its effects in the tumultuous decades between 1480 and 1530. This period witnessed exceptional reversals of political fortune, when 'hell

¹⁵ While Pazzi prohibited virtually all sixteen convents from accepting new nuns, he specifically admonished six of them – Santa Felicità, San Martino fuori Porta Prato, Sant'Agata, Santa Maria Disciplina al Portico, San Luca, and Santa Maria presso San Miniato al Monte – not to accept additional girls, 'puellam sive iuvenem', 'nec per eis conservandis sive erudiendis'; AAF, VP.03.1, fasc. 1, 2, 3, 4, quote at visit to Sant'Agata. Since Pazzi visited only Benedictines, Augustinians, and various hermitages that fell within his jurisdiction, there likely were other convents affiliated with different monastic orders that specialized in custodial care, especially houses located outside the city walls. However, a systematic examination of available fifteenth-century account books for Santa Verdiana (Vallombrosan) and San Jacopo di Ripoli (Dominican) reveals no indication of custodial activities there.

¹⁶ For the locations and brief descriptions of these convents in the immediate vicinity of Florence, see P. Roselli and O. Fantozzi Micali, *Itinerari della memoria. Badie, conventi, monasteri in Toscana* (Florence, 1987).

¹⁷ For instance, the convent of Santa Maria al Vergine became the seed house for the later institution of the Ceppo, founded in 1556. In 1744 the entity known as the Fanciulle di Santa Caterina, founded during the famine of 1591, was transferred to the convent of San Luca, where the girls performed various kinds of manual work; R. Manno Tolu, 'Ricordanze delle abbandonate fiorentine di Santa Maria e San Niccolò del Ceppo nei secoli XVII–XVIII', in *Studi in onore di Arnaldo D'Addario* (Lecce, 1995), 1007–24. San Piero a Monticelli became one of the most enduring Florentine girls' conservatories, best known for having housed the future saint Caterina de' Ricci as a boarder in 1533. A brief history of the house is sketched by M. Casini Wanrooij, C. Frosinini, and G. P. Trotta, *La Chiesa ed il conservatorio di S. Pietro a Monticelli. Memorie storiche ed artistiche* (Florence, 1990). Although the Franciscan tertiary house of Sant'Onofrio (known as Fuligno) engaged in limited guardianship in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, it became a full-fledged conservatory for girls only in 1829; A. Marucelli (ed.), *L'Educatore della SS. Concezione detto 'Il Fuligno' di Firenze: il suo archivio, la sua storia. Inventario* (Florence, 1999).

¹⁸ Although Santa Felicità was among the institutions Pazzi prohibited from accepting additional pupils or boarders, internal administrative records do not indicate an extensive clientele.

seemed open' as the Medici came in and out of power and Italy lost its autonomy to foreign invaders.¹⁹ What also conditioned the changing terms of female guardianship in these decades were repeated visitations of plague, the fruition of dowry inflation, the deployment of extensive patronage networks across the peninsula, and the preoccupation with an honour culture decades in the making. These historical factors coincided to make *serbanza* a widespread social practice in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Although boarding accounts appear sporadically in the first half of the Quattrocento, the first evidence from San Luca that can be treated systematically begins in the 1460s. Between 1465 and 1473, the convent housed thirty-three girls as boarders. Over the next six decades, the influx of boarders remained remarkably constant.²⁰ San Luca averaged thirty-three or thirty-four boarders per decade, or between three and four boarders per year from the 1460s through the 1520s. The single convent of San Luca thus housed a total of over 200 boarders during this period.

These figures were similar to those of two other communities comparable in size and custodial reputation. The Gerusalemite nuns of San Niccolò dei Friari accepted three to five girls annually from 1510 to 1540, as did the Augustinians of Lapo in the late fifteenth century.²¹ Although the Benedictine nuns of Sant'Appollonia also enjoyed a reputation for their outstanding care of girls by 1450, they catered to a more exclusive clientele and charged higher boarding fees, which restricted the number of boarders to about two per year between 1471 and 1501.²² Their counterparts at San Piero a Monticelli and Sant'Agata ran far more robust enterprises. San Piero a Monticelli sheltered at least fifty-four girls in the decade 1495–1505, while thirty-five girls boarded at Sant'Agata in the 1520s.²³ Whether the scale of boarding activities was large or small, these institutions collectively exposed thousands of girls and women to the routines of convent life, if only for brief periods.

¹⁹ L. Landucci, *A Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516*, ed. I. del Badia, trans. A. de Rosen Jervis (London, 1927), 145.

²⁰ Evidence for nine of the ten years between 1480 and 1489 shows a population of thirty-four boarders coming into the house. From 1490 to 1499 San Luca took in thirty-three boarders; between 1500 and 1509, thirty-four girls lived in *serbanza*. Records for the 1510s are very untidy, but at least thirty-one girls were taken into custody during this decade. These data are compiled from *Monastero di San Luca*, vols 1, 2, 12, 29, and 78.

²¹ Strocchia, 'Learning the virtues', 14–15. The proportion of boarders to the rest of the monastic community at San Luca, San Niccolò, and Lapo was somewhat smaller but still consonant with the figures cited by P. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore, 1989), 98: 'In general, six to twelve girls between the ages of 7 and 16 lived and learned in typical female monasteries with thirty to one hundred nuns, lay sisters, and novices, all across Italy'.

²² A total of seventy-six girls boarded at the convent from 1471 to 1501, where annual boarding fees were twenty florins; CRSGF.82, vol. 79. Lorenzo il Magnifico's sister Maria was in *serbanza* at Sant'Appollonia from July 1472 to March 1473, after which she was transferred to Le Murate; fol. 28'. The nuns of Sant'Appollonia clearly had been active custodians before these years; in 1450–51 they posted individual accounts for nine boarders 'in guardia', all of whom came from elite families which patronized the convent; CRSGF.82, vol. 11.

²³ San Piero a Monticelli, vol. 25, fols 2'–58'; Sant'Agata, vols 49 and 50.

While the average number of boarders at San Luca remained steady over the half-century from 1480 to 1530, the particulars of custodial practice nonetheless moved in two opposite directions. One trajectory of change was a greater number of short-term boarders – those staying less than one year – in response to the various crises that plagued Florence during this period. In the 1480s, only three of thirty-two boarders whose tenures can be determined stayed for less than a year; in the 1490s, nine of thirty-five did so; in the 1500s, fourteen of thirty-two. The convent of San Niccolò dei Frieri felt similar pressures from short-term boarders.²⁴ Short-term boarding arrangements provided critical shelter to girls stripped of suitable family care because of political exile, plague, famine, warfare, or other upheaval. Even Florentines living in intact households sought to shelter their young daughters from possible physical assault or rape, as the peninsula was overrun repeatedly by soldiers after the French invasion of 1494. Although the diarist Landucci noted that French troops generally were well behaved when they occupied the city, Florentines took no chances with their vulnerable female youth: ‘Few of us had sent away our womenkind, except the young girls, who were sent to convents and to relatives where no soldiers were quartered.’²⁵ While communities of religious women relied to some extent on physical enclosure for their protection, their main defence lay in social and religious taboos against violating their privileged spaces, sanctified reputations, and consecrated bodies.

What also augmented the number of short-term boarders was the reliance on certain convents by the Officers of the Wards (*Pupilli*) to house their young charges temporarily. Using convents as custodial institutions was expedient in the short run and gave the Florentine commune a vested interest in a broad range of convents that practised open reclusion. Yet this practice only exacerbated tensions between the multiple social and religious roles convents performed, which helped fuel the wholesale restructuring of the monastic landscape by Cosimo I after 1545. In the 1480s the *Pupilli* magistrates frequently turned to the Benedictines of Sant’Agata, and began using the custodial services of San Luca regularly in the 1490s. These temporary boarding arrangements pulled the magistracy into the particulars of convent life, while pushing convents to engage in additional transactions with the lay world. For instance, in September 1492 the nuns of Sant’Agata were forced to petition the five *Pupilli* officials to review the case of the Pescian girl Ippolita, daughter of the deceased Lorenzo Tani. The magistrates had placed Ippolita in the convent with no subsidy, so legal action became necessary to obtain a grain stipend to feed her.²⁶ Three years later the same nuns finally

²⁴ Monastero di San Luca, vol. 29. A similarly rapid turnover in pupils and boarders can be seen at the convent of San Niccolò dei Frieri. This convent accepted thirty-four girls in *serbanza* between 1515 and 1529, eleven of them during the siege of 1529; Strocchia, ‘Learning the virtues’, 14, 28.

²⁵ Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 59.

²⁶ Sant’Agata, vol. 47, fol. 107.

collected on the account owed for the ward Pippa Riccialbani by negotiating the sale of various items her brother and guarantor Antonio had stored for safekeeping in another convent. Perhaps the nuns extended extra patience to this truncated household, because they had already sheltered Pippa's two sisters and cousin between 1473 and 1483. In other instances, the fragmentation of households caused by a father's death left underage male heirs in strained circumstances that dictated custodial arrangements. The brothers of Lisabetta di Antonio da Panzano placed her in Sant'Agata in June 1485 with the understanding that she 'would work for herself', bringing along one pair of sheets which she could claim upon departure.²⁷

The civic use of convents as temporary boarding houses introduced a new class mix at San Luca, Sant'Agata, and similar institutions. In the close confines of the cloister, the offspring of notaries, dyers, tailors, smiths, shoemakers, and shopkeepers rubbed shoulders with their social superiors, who shared both similar circumstances of dislocation and similar experiences of institutional care. At San Luca in 1519, for instance, the two granddaughters of the famous humanist Giannozzo Manetti, whose accounts were paid by the *Pupilli*, performed the same daily routines as did Agnoletta, the daughter of a waller.²⁸ In the 1530s and 1540s, when many foreign officials passed through the area, San Luca added yet another element to its heterogeneous mix by sheltering several Spanish girls and other non-Florentines.²⁹ Girls boarding at San Piero a Monticelli showed a similar mix of class and family circumstances, which can be illustrated in microcosm by the social profile of the nine boarders living in the house in May 1516. This cluster included two girls from well-known merchant lineages who were wards; four girls from intact elite households; the niece of a local priest, who probably was also a ward; a tailor's daughter, another ward; and the daughter of a physician.³⁰

The extent to which girls from different social strata and locales befriended each other is an important question that lies beyond our present documentary reach. No doubt their guardians expected at a minimum that girls would be suitably sheltered, and would learn similar lessons from their convent mentors about proper deportment, the appropriate integration of

²⁷ Sant'Agata, vol. 47, fol. 30^v; vol. 48, fols 91^v, 205^v; vol. 49, fol. 69^v. The account did not state what kind of work Lisabetta would do, although presumably it was some kind of piece work in textiles. The girl died four years after entering Sant'Agata, on 7 April 1489, and was buried in the convent church.

²⁸ Monastero di San Luca, vol. 1, fol. 17^v; vol. 2, fol. 93^v.

²⁹ San Luca accepted the four-year old-Isabella, 'spagnola', into care in 1539, where she stayed until 1544; another Spaniard named Marianna lodged in the convent from 1549 to 1552. Other girls came from Rome, Bologna, Prato, and Borgo San Sepolcro; Monastero di San Luca, vol. 12.

³⁰ San Piero a Monticelli, vol. 26, fols 28^v–29^v. The two well-born wards were Margherita Bonsi and Gostanza del Garbo; those from intact households were Margherita Antinori, Brigida Bonsi, Contessa Castellani, and Marietta Buondelmonti, usually identified by her relationship as niece to the future Florentine archbishop Messer Andrea Buondelmonti. The group also included Nannina, niece of the priest Ser Antonio; Ginevra, daughter of Carlo di Pasquino, identified variably as either a tailor (*sarto*) or a broker (*sensale*); and the physician's daughter Maddalena di Maestro Benedetto.

work and prayer, and the need to accommodate others. Despite the absence of a formal curriculum, convent boarding nonetheless exposed girls to an active, formative socialization that stressed particular values and behaviours. Both the custodial experience and the monastic values it instilled provided an institutional platform for female culture based primarily on prescriptive gender norms rather than on class or regional differences. Girls' common experiences as boarders also meant that the practice of *serbanza* probably functioned as an important vehicle for cultural transmission and diffusion, as well as for female socialization. As boarders, secular girls were privy to the cultural developments taking place inside particular religious communities, such as the painting of Castagno's *Last Supper* at Sant'Appollonia, the staging of convent dramas at San Niccolò dei Frieri, and the production or acquisition of illuminated choral books at various houses. In other words, girls were exposed at an early age both to monastic habits and to specific forms of Renaissance culture, each of which probably helped shape their reading tastes, artistic preferences, and social behaviours as adults. Ironically, girls and women formed the primary audience for these forms of cultural production, from which men were excluded because of their sex.

The exceptionally perilous years from 1527 to 1531 stimulated a peak in monastic guardianship. In this brief but difficult period that saw the rise and fall of the last Florentine republic, a full-blown siege by foreign troops, a plague episode, and severe food shortages, Sant'Appollonia alone posted individual boarding accounts for forty-six girls and women; where the community physically housed this crush of new residents that doubled its core population is unclear.³¹ Even elite convents like San Pier Maggiore, which normally did not engage heavily in guardianship as an economic or social activity, took in short-term lay boarders more frequently in the 1520s and 1530s to ensure their physical safety. Like their monastic counterparts throughout the city, the nuns of San Pier Maggiore responded aggressively to the crisis of the 1529 siege by sheltering 'many girls and women, both citizens and country dwellers from inside and outside on account of the war'. These women included daughters of well-born families with long-standing ties to the house, who 'took refuge in our convent for fear of the soldiers', leading to severe food shortages in the community.³² The very real dangers posed to women's honour and physical safety by the appearance of Charles V's troops in 1536 forced a new influx of 'many young noble girls' and other

³¹ CRSGF.82, vols 16 and 80.

³² San Pier Maggiore, vol. 135, fol. 24', dated 10 October 1529. The convent procurator Ser Benedetto Bambelli sold the nuns ten moggia of his own grain, which he was storing in the house of Monna Gostanza Albizzi, a member of one of the leading parish families. The convent needed more food because the nuns 'ricevute molte bocche di fanciulle et donne cittadine et contadine fuori et drento per la guerra'. Among those being sheltered was the daughter of a convent patron Francesco de' Ricci, 'la quale decto aveva rifuggita in nostro monastero per paura delli soldati'; San Pier Maggiore, vol. 84, fol. 229'. The stream of boarders taking shelter in the Annalena during the siege is documented in CRSGF.105, vol. 1.

vulnerable women into convent precincts.³³ Yet nuns clearly made some discriminating decisions about who was allowed the privilege of shelter. The nuns of Sant'Appollonia apparently accepted girls into custody in 1527–31 by capitular decision, much as they accepted new postulants to replenish their ranks.³⁴ The acute crises of these years made clear the advantage of having a nun in the family, who could sponsor a postulant or advocate for a boarder from within. Through guardianship, Florentine families reaped the rewards of long years of monastic patronage and placement.

As political circumstances deteriorated in the early sixteenth century, wealthy older women as well as girls took refuge in convents in increasing numbers. These wives and widows did not establish long-term relationships as permanent annuitants (*commesse*) but rather brokered the same kind of flexible boarding agreements as applied to young girls. Some of these women also sought refuge for their servants and clients, further increasing the problem of numbers.³⁵ Older boarders presented a different set of challenges to monastic life than did young secular girls. While they did not require the same sort of hands-on supervision as youngsters, widows imported their worldly life experiences and family concerns into communal affairs. As they aged and fell ill, they might require special attention to food and medical care, which helps explain their higher boarding fees and more complicated boarding transactions. Moreover, wealthy laywomen often brought with them elevated expectations about living standards that flew in the face of monastic frugality. For instance, the politically active patron Argentina Malaspina, wife of the *gonfaloniere a vita* Piero Soderini, moved from the Palazzo Vecchio to her private room at the convent of Le Murate during her husband's absence on communal business in 1509, primarily to protect their reputations from gossip. She had paid the abbess Speranza Signorini the hefty sum of 200 florins for the privilege of lodging in the convent; the abbess spent half the money to furnish Argentina's bedroom in appropriate fashion, and wisely tucked away the other half to offset future building expenses.³⁶ Despite these additional burdens, convents anticipated

³³ For instance, 'molte nobili fanciulle sono posto (sic) in serbo' at San Niccolò dei Frieri when foreign troops appeared; Acquisti e Doni, vol. 293, unfoliated. In April 1536, the nuns of San Piero a Monticelli, whose location outside the walls made their neighbourhood particularly vulnerable, sheltered the daughters of a local innkeeper, along with the niece of a Monna Giuletta, 'quando ci venne lo imperadore che passo da firenze'; San Piero a Monticelli, vol. 28, fol. 3'.

³⁴ CRSGE.82, vol. 16, regularly used the same linguistic formula to indicate that a boarder had been accepted ('fu accettata') into *serbanza* as that used for a new postulant.

³⁵ For instance, Giulia Orsini, countess of Pitigliano and kin to Alfonsina Orsini Medici, wrote to the abbess of Le Murate on 26 November 1498, asking the nuns to care for the daughter of a client: 'ho una mia zitella figliola di uno gentiluomo molto modesta desideraria per un poco di tempo non vi essendo molesto stesse appresso della carità vostre per imparare virtù e massime di cosire (= cucire) e di quelle cose si aspettano alle donne virtuose e da bene'. Acquisti e Doni, vol. 293, unfoliated.

³⁶ Chronicle of Suora Giustina Niccolini, dated 1597. Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze (= BNF).II.II.509, fol. 71'. For contemporary criticisms of Argentina's patronage activities, see H. C. Butters, *Governors and Government in Early-Sixteenth Century Florence, 1502–1519* (Oxford, 1985), 96.

rightly that both older boarders and *commesse* would reward the community financially when they left or died.³⁷

By the time Florence weathered the terrible siege of 1529–30, a remarkably heterogeneous population of women had lived or was living behind convent walls. In contrast to the more specialized custodial institutions for women and girls that sprang up in the mid-sixteenth century in response to state formation and ‘new’ social problems such as prostitution, San Luca and similar communities combined different constituencies and functions under one roof.³⁸ Exposure to the rhythms, routines, and restrictions of convent life not only formed part of the common experience of thousands of middle and upper-class women and girls throughout the city, it also embedded an understanding of monastic institutions in an experiential way in their own lives that likely conditioned women’s ongoing interactions with convents, whether as small-scale patrons, protective mothers, or pious, sociable widows. Women’s continued allegiance to convents in testamentary bequests has been characterized as ‘traditional’, even unresponsive to new developments in Renaissance charity.³⁹ Part of this sustained support, in the form of legacies, donations *inter vivos*, small gifts and loans, and other forms of patronage, stemmed from the many significant ways that convents figured into laywomen’s daily lives. Many laywomen not only enjoyed ties of family and friendship with individual religious women, but also had a deep, personal familiarity with life behind convent walls that was not shared by their male counterparts.

The common social experiences underpinning female culture were given additional force by the second change in the practice of *serbanza*, which pointed in the opposite direction to short-term boarding arrangements. In the mid-Quattrocento, it had been rare for a boarder to remain longer than five years. A lengthy tenure usually resulted from a girl’s tender age

³⁷ Two examples will have to suffice. In 1511 Lucrezia Ridolfi, widow of Messer Girolamo Rossi, retired to live in the convent of San Niccolò dei Frieri, to which she bequeathed 100 florins on her death; Acquisti e Doni, vol. 293, unfol. Cassandra Martelli was placed in the care of Sant’Agata by her uncle Niccolò prior to July 1482, when he pledged 100 florins to the nuns, who were either to keep her as a nun or ‘guard’ her according to convent usage. The nuns assigned her a separate room; if Cassandra left the convent for any reason or for any length of time without the nuns’ consent, Niccolò had to forfeit the money without obligation. Cassandra lived in Sant’Agata as a *commessa* until her death in July 1492. She left all her belongings and an unspecified sum of money to the nuns, with the proviso that they had to provide a furnished bed for the servant assigned to her, also named Cassandra; the remaining money subsidized masses for her soul; Sant’Agata. vol. 47, fol. 106; vol. 48, fol. 144.

³⁸ D. Lombardi, ‘Poveri a Firenze. Programmi e realizzazioni della politica assistenziale dei Medici tra Cinque e Seicento’, in G. Politi, M. Rosa, and F. della Peruta (eds), *Timori e carità. I Poveri nell’Italia moderna* (Cremona, 1982), 165–84. Other bibliography on women’s custodial institutions can be approached through M. Chojnacka, ‘Women, charity and community in early modern Venice: the case delle Zitelle’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 51 (1998), 68–91, and more recently through the collection of articles edited by N. Terpstra, *The Politics of Ritual Kinship: Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, 2000).

³⁹ S. K. Cohn Jr, ‘Nuns and dowry funds: women’s choices in the Renaissance’, in *idem*, *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore and London, 1996), 76–97.

combined with unfortunate personal or family circumstances.⁴⁰ Beginning in the 1480s, however, more and more young girls extended their residence in convents for periods of five to ten years or even longer. For instance, the banker's daughter Caterina Guiducci, the notary's niece Ginevra del Cappa, and the dyer's daughters Marietta and Lucretia all boarded for close to seven years at San Luca. Amelia Cortigiani spent eight years there, while Ginevra del Cappello resided in the convent for nine years during the 1480s and 1490s.⁴¹ Long-term boarding arrangements became especially apparent by the 1510s, with at least seven boarders remaining for six or more years.⁴² A few girls spent essentially their entire youth within convent confines. Alessandra Canigiani remained in the house for at least ten years (1521–31), while Camilla Gaetani (1513–30) and Lionarda de' Medici (1511–29) both spent close to eighteen years together as boarders. Oretta da Filicaia lived in *serbanza* at San Luca for at least seventeen years (1487–1504). She was so familiar to the community that when she boarded again as an unmarried adult in 1520 the records slipped between calling her 'little Oretta' and 'Madame'.⁴³ Similar patterns were repeated on a smaller scale at other convents like San Pier Maggiore.

The impact of lengthy convent residence on social relationships has yet to be reconstructed. At present we know little about the kinds of relationships that developed between girls who grew into adulthood together, between older women and young boarders, or between girls and their monastic mentors. But it seems reasonable to infer that a wealth of experiences shared within close quarters over a decade or more gave long-term boarders a different sense of female community than was available in household, parish, or neighbourhood.⁴⁴ The practice of *serbanza* also gave distinct continuities to the female life cycle within and across generations, since some form of monastic experience might be common to several women in the same household and extended family. For instance, Fiammetta, daughter of the humanist Francesco da Diacceto, boarded at San Piero a Monticelli in 1520; thirteen years later, her stepdaughter Alessandra de' Ricci (later Santa Caterina de' Ricci) repeated the experience

⁴⁰ For example, the Franciscan nuns of San Matteo in Arcetri outside the city walls reported in their 1438 tax return that they housed 'una pazza che abbiamo in serbanza', for whom they received an annual credit of twenty-five florins from the Monte; Catasto, vol. 602, fols 91'–93'. The unmarried daughter of Tommaso Monaldi, age twenty-four, was already in long-term care at Cestello in 1427, presumably because she was not marriageable; Acquisti e Doni, vol. 293, unfoliated.

⁴¹ Monastero di San Luca, vol. 29, fols 22', 26', 45', 52', 60', 62''.

⁴² Monastero di San Luca, vol. 2, records long-term accounts for Camilla Gaetani (1513–30), Lionarda de' Medici (1511–29), Caterina Benivieni (1513–20), Diamante and Lucrezia Manetti (1517–23), Maddalena Cambi (1519–28), and Ginevra Manente (1519–24).

⁴³ For Alessandra Canigiani, see Monastero di San Luca, vol. 78, fols 96', 137'; for Oretta da Filicaia, vol. 29, fols 37', 60', 63', 64', 105', 106'.

⁴⁴ At San Pier Maggiore, the secular girls lived together in a single room. San Pier Maggiore, vol. 168, fol. 25', dated 19 December 1522, notes carpentry expenses of L.2.12 'per un telaio da finestra per lla camera delle seholare'.

in the same house. Fiammetta's younger cousin Antonia was exposed to similar habits and lifestyles as a boarder at Sant'Ambrogio in 1530–3, where Fiammetta's older sister was a nun.⁴⁵ Cousins, daughters, and sisters shared an insider's view of convent life with each other and with other laywomen, especially among the elite, that transcended the boundaries of individual households and generations.

The interwoven life stories of several affluent yet vulnerable women of the Pazzi family tell us about both the constructed nature of family and female community to which *serbanza* contributed, as well as the common currency of monastic life many women shared.⁴⁶ Francesca de' Pazzi took shelter in San Pier Maggiore as an unmarried adult in 1508, thirty years after her father Franceschino's participation in the 1478 plot against the Medici had ruined her marriage prospects.⁴⁷ Over the next decade Francesca alternated between the convent and secular world, living in San Pier Maggiore for increasingly long periods. Around 1521, she took up continuous residence there, becoming a permanent annuitant in 1526, by which time she shared as much of a personal history with her surrogate monastic family as with her blood kin. While she could not participate in formal chapter decisions, Francesca was privy to deep layers of local knowledge that she used on behalf of her female relations. She helped her eighteen-year old cousin Bianca start building a new cell for herself immediately upon her entry as a novice in 1526, rather than waiting for a larger renovation project to begin or another nun to die before obtaining private quarters, as did other new nuns of her class. She also acted as a well-positioned, influential lay guardian to three other nieces and cousins – Alessandra, Luisa, and Camilla – who spent short periods in guardianship at San Pier Maggiore between 1527 and 1536.⁴⁸ Although the particular details of Francesca Pazzi's story remain unique, her general experience nonetheless summarizes several key elements of women's social world that were shared to some extent across class lines: its fluid, contingent nature, hinging on vulnerability within family structures as well as on the accidents of life; the reliance on often dense, diverse female networks to

⁴⁵ San Piero a Monticelli, vol. 26, fol. 68^r; vol. 27, fol. 82^r; CRSGF.79, vol. 62, fols 401^r–402^r.

⁴⁶ This formulation of constructed community is indebted to N. Terpstra, 'Mothers, sisters and daughters: girls and conservatory guardianship in late Renaissance Florence', *Renaissance Studies*, 17 (2003), 201–29.

⁴⁷ For Franceschino's primary role in the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478, see H. Acton, *The Pazzi Conspiracy: The Plot against the Medici* (London, 1979). After helping to murder Giuliano de' Medici, Franceschino was hanged from a window of the city hall. His brother Guglielmo was spared punishment because he was married to Lorenzo de' Medici's sister Bianca, and it was this uncle and his heirs who subsidized Francesca's residence in the convent. Whoever married her would have lost the right to hold office in Florence, among other punishments. Several of the key documents of censure are published in A. Poliziano, *Della congiura de' Pazzi*, ed. A. Perosa (Padua, 1958), 77–90.

⁴⁸ For Francesca's accounts through 1535, see San Pier Maggiore, vol. 165, fol. 93; vol. 166, fols 120^r–121^r; vol. 167, fol. 211^r; vol. 83, fol. 8^v; vol. 88, fol. 13^r. After 1528 she was called 'Monna' Francesca as a mark of age and respect. For Bianca Pazzi, see vol. 84, fol. 28^r; for Alessandra, vol. 83, fol. 42^r; for Luisa, vol. 84, fol. 73^r; for Camilla, vol. 88, fol. 25^r.

fashion a distinct form of community, in which the convent as both institution and symbol formed a crucial nexus; and the adaptation by women themselves of the custodial settings available to them.

Life as a boarder also transformed some girls into stakeholders at these institutions, creating ongoing chains of patronage and largesse that ranged from great to small. When Giovanni Benci entrusted his three-year-old daughter Alessandra to the nuns of Sant'Ambrogio in 1449,⁴⁹ he had already placed his older daughter Caterina at Le Murate, where he was celebrated as a great benefactor. During Caterina's tenure there in the late 1440s and early 1450s, she reportedly became a legendary favourite in the house, developing a special, affectionate bond with the abbess, Scholastica Rondinelli. A later sixteenth-century nun-chronicler recounted how the young girl 'was loved by the entire convent, and was kept by the abbess like her own daughter'.⁵⁰ Together the young Caterina and the abbess used their combined influence to petition Giovanni successfully for still greater financial assistance. Giovanni's granddaughter Ginevra continued the Benci association with Le Murate; she was reared under the same abbess's loving care in the 1460s and 1470s. After a long life as wife and widow, Ginevra Benci Niccolini rejoined her former nun-mentors by requesting burial in the special tomb reserved for lay affiliates located in the convent church, dressed in the habit of a Murate nun.⁵¹

These examples help us contextualize the experience of the most famous Florentine boarder – that of Catherine de' Medici, future queen of France – who retained strong ties to her surrogate monastic family at Le Murate. During the political upheavals of 1527 that led to her family's ouster, Catherine had been placed in the Dominican convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, 'in order to be raised there under the tutelage and care of those holy and religious mothers' until the city's troubles were over. When plague struck that house, however, the Florentine priors granted the request of the French ambassador to transfer Catherine to the healthier environment of Le Murate.⁵² The eight-year-old Catherine arrived at Le Murate in December 1527 and remained there until July 1530, when the anti-Medicean sentiments of some nuns forced her departure to the more secure political ally of Santa Lucia. Although her presence intensified factionalism within Le Murate, the community as a whole nonetheless successfully countered the actions of the *Otto di Guardia*, which wanted Catherine held under a form of house arrest.

⁴⁹ CRSGE.79, vol. 455, fol. 6'. Benci paid the nuns twenty-seven florins in May 1449 for his daughter's upkeep, but he owed them much more according to the account.

⁵⁰ BNF.II.II. 509, fol. 25': 'amata da tutto il convento et della Badessa tenuta per propria figliuola'.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* fol. 28'.

⁵² *Ibid.* fols 89'–90': 'per doversi quivi allevare sotto l'educazione e custodia di quelle sante et religiose Madri'. Suora Giustina speculated that the convent successfully avoided contagion by taking preventive measures such as dipping the money thrown through the grate as alms into a vat of vinegar to disinfect it (fol. 51'). For the details leading to these political maneuvers, see J. N. Stephens, 'L'infanzia fiorentina di Caterina de' Medici, Regina di Francia', *Archivio storico italiano*, 142 (1984), 421–36.

After the siege, Catherine returned briefly to Le Murate before proceeding to Rome, where she married Henri of Orleans in 1533. As queen of France, Catherine handsomely repaid the protection of her monastic guardians during this vulnerable episode in her life. She sustained a regular correspondence with the abbesses of Le Murate for over forty years (1542–88) and eventually donated various properties to the convent in appreciation (1584).⁵³

Lengthy boarding tenures also laid the foundations for what became the dominant type of elite female education in the early modern period. In fact, San Luca itself evolved into an elite boarding school for adolescent girls by the 1590s. This ‘new’ type of *serbanza*, as it was still called at San Luca, was far more regularized and operated as an explicit social filter. Guardians made payments for ‘one semester’ in advance, rather than paying accounts retroactively. All of the fifty-six girls accepted from 1607–29 were between twelve and seventeen years old; all came from elite families whose kin relationship to one of the resident nuns was recorded in the documents. The girls arrived in clusters of two or three per month, although not yet on a fixed calendar, and paid much higher annual boarding fees, of thirty to thirty-six scudi. Several of the girls reportedly came ‘to see the convent’, as a way to enjoy the sometimes spectacular entertainments staged inside the walls, and to evaluate convent life without making a formal commitment.⁵⁴ San Niccolò dei Frieri, known after the siege as San Giovannino de’ Cavalieri, followed a similar path of development into a full-fledged boarding school. Relocated to Via San Gallo, this house mentored four to six girls annually through the late 1560s, when it escalated its educational activities to accommodate up to eighteen pupils in the 1570s. Among its charges was the future saint Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi, who entered the nuns’ care as an eight-year-old girl in 1575 for a four-year period.⁵⁵

The evolution of fixed, specialized forms of guardianship intersected with broader changes in the Florentine custodial landscape in the crucial years from 1540 to 1560. The stabilization of the regime under Cosimo I relieved threats to girls’ physical safety, while the aristocratization of Florentine society fed an already voracious monastic expansion. Boarding practices continued to be varied and diffused in the middle decades of the Cinquecento, but some houses began to taper off their custodial activities or otherwise change

⁵³ CRSGF.81, vol. 100, carte 258–87; donation dated June 1584 at no. 259. In return for her bequest, Catherine wanted commemorative offices performed for her husband Henri II.

⁵⁴ Monastero di San Luca, vol. 78, fols 204–221. Advance payments were made for ‘un semestre’, even for those girls who came ‘per vedere il convento’. The interest in witnessing convent dramas, especially during Lent, is noted by E. Weaver, ‘Spiritual fun: a study of sixteenth-century Tuscan convent theater’, in M. B. Rose (ed.), *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives* (Syracuse, NY, 1986), 173–205.

⁵⁵ CRSGF.133, vol. 60, 53–200 for pupils in the house between 1540–90; notices for the tenure of ‘Lucrezia’ de’ Pazzi, as the saint was known in the world, at 116–9.

their terms.⁵⁶ San Luca, Sant'Agata, and similar institutions gradually stopped taking in both short-term boarders and poorer girls. In the 1540s, for instance, San Luca accepted only sixteen boarders, about half the customary number, all of who came from well-known families.⁵⁷ Moreover, a greater proportion of girls placed in *serbanza*, especially wards of the *Pupilli*, were intended to take the veil. As Nicholas Terpstra demonstrates in the next essay, other groups and institutions picked up the task of caring for wards and *fanciulle abbandonate* around 1550, just as convents themselves were consolidated as elite strongholds subject to new strictures regarding enclosure. Ambitious grand-ducal initiatives, like the expansion of the Innocenti, offered additional forms of social assistance.⁵⁸ The development of more specialized custodial institutions for girls was not only central to the process of state formation in Tuscany; these new institutions also elaborated the fine-grained social distinctions upon which early modern society rested. While elsewhere in Italy it was primarily the Tridentine reforms that broke the educational patterns long favoured by nuns, the story of convent schooling and female guardianship in Florence took a new twist years earlier in conjunction with the reorganization of politics, society, and charity.⁵⁹

II

It was the brisk traffic of boarders coming into San Luca and other convents, whether for short or long terms, that Archbishop Pazzi sought to contain in his 1509 injunction. The decision by the San Luca nuns to continue boarding girls regardless of the penalty must have turned, in large part, on the critical, immediate revenue girls provided. At its most basic level, taking girls into custody was a fundamental strategy for survival. Like their counterparts

⁵⁶ A partial survey of twenty-two convents made sometime in the late 1540s by the new ducal supervisors reported a total of forty-eight girls and women living in *serbanza* at that time, although the census was far from exhaustive or systematic. San Giuseppe topped the list, with seven girls; Sant'Anna, which in 1509 declared proudly that it did not house secular girls, followed with six. San Niccolò di Cafaggio and Santa Maria Disciplina al Portico each sheltered five, while San Martino and San Luca had four girls apiece. The houses of Fuligno, San Giorgio, and the Boldrone each housed two girls. In addition, there were five adult women living in *serbanza* at San Pier Maggiore, two at the Bigallo, and a mix of four younger and older women at Sant'Orsola, including an adult woman with her servant, along with a widow and her daughter. However, Sant'Appollonia, San Piero a Monticelli, Sant'Agata, Santa Maria sul Prato, the Annalena, and Sant'Ambrogio – all houses with previously established custodial practices – reported no girls in *serbanza*; Auditore dei beni ecclesiastici poi Segretario del Regio Diritto, vol. 4892, fols 10^r–43^r, 115^r–116^r, 125^{va}, 128^r, 135^r, 141^r, 156^{va}, 314^r–315^r, 320^r–340^r. My thanks to K. Lowe for bringing this volume to my attention.

⁵⁷ Monastero di San Luca, vols 12 and 78. Convent accounts record no instances of *serbanza* between 1555 and 1593, making it impossible to provide a fine-grained analysis of this transition.

⁵⁸ Terpstra, 'Mothers, sisters and daughters'. S. Evangelisti provides a good summary of grand-ducal changes in convent management after 1545 in 'Art and the advent of *clausura*: the convent of Saint Catherine of Siena in Tridentine Florence', in J. Nelson (ed.), *Suor Plautilla Nelli (1523–1588): The First Woman Painter of Florence* (Florence, 2000), 67–82. Broader developments in charitable institutions under Cosimo I can be approached through P. Gavitt, 'Charity and state building in Cinquecento Florence: Vincenzo Borghini as administrator of the Ospedale degli Innocenti', *Journal of Modern History*, 69 (1997), 230–70.

⁵⁹ Zarri, *Recinti*, 172–8.

elsewhere in Italy, Florentine female monastic communities operated on small economic margins, with little buffer against poor yields, declining rents, unexpected taxes, or other financial pitfalls. The nuns of San Luca claimed that they did not have sufficient income on which to live, and their balance sheet bears out this assertion. At the time of Pazzi's visit, the annual income from their four boarders – fifty-two florins – equalled the combined money rents collected from all convent property holdings.⁶⁰ Similarly, that same year the Augustinian nuns of Santa Maria Disciplina al Portico netted forty florins from their four boarders, a sum which exceeded their cash income from rents and leases by roughly five florins.⁶¹

Nuns themselves clearly understood the asset value of custodial activities as part of their larger economic portfolio. One section of San Luca's account book dated 1517 was devoted to income generated by 'all the rents, leases, farm labourers, and girls in guardianship' the convent managed.⁶² As a flexible source of revenue, boarding allowed nuns to adjust the influx of new occupants in line with particular communal needs. For instance, accepting an exceptionally large cohort of fourteen boarders at San Piero a Monticelli in the summer of 1516 offered the nuns a way to finance extensive repairs to the dormitory and church roofs over the next three years. Conversely, Sant'Agata experienced an unusual lull in guardianship between 1496 and 1510, in part because the community was growing rapidly with new postulants.⁶³ Moreover, boarding fees were far more responsive to market fluctuations than long-term leases or rents; they could be made to reflect both a girl's presumed consumption based on age, and 'the shortages and tightness of the times'.⁶⁴ Although boarding income generally went into communal coffers, on occasion individual nuns who served as mentors received a small, separate fee, which gave them discretionary means to supplement their diet, replace an ageing tunic, or purchase a devotional object.⁶⁵ Without the

⁶⁰ AAF, VP.03.1, fasc. 2. 'da 4 fanciulle tengniamo in serbanza che pagono infra tutta i 4 F. 52 larghi d'oro in oro l'anno, sono L. 364'. The convent's properties yielded L.363 in annual rents, not including the foodstuffs produced on their farms, which amounted to 497 staia of grain, fifty-five barrels of wine, and five barrels of oil.

⁶¹ AAF, VP.03.1, fasc. 2. This convent received L.250, or 35.7 florins, from its 'fitti e pigione', and forty florins from 'fanciulle in serbanza'. The four girls named in the visitation record were the sisters Maddalena and Ginevra di Carlo Carnesecchi, Bartolomea di Domenico Masini, and Lucrezia di Raffaello Antinori. The nuns also reported the foodstuffs derived from their farm holdings, but their annual consumption far outweighed these proceeds.

⁶² Monastero di San Luca, vol. 2, unfoliated flyleaf, dated 1517: 'tutti i pigioni e lavoratori e fanciulle in serbo e fittaiuoli'.

⁶³ San Piero a Monticelli, vol. 26, fols 28^v–33^v; Sant'Agata, vol. 49.

⁶⁴ The nuns of Sant'Agata, for instance, raised their annual boarding fees from twenty to twenty-four florins in 1539, 'per la penuria et stretezza de' tempi'. Sant'Agata, vol. 50, fol. 232^v. It was standard convent practice when drawing up a long-term boarding agreement to establish an escalating scale of fees as girls got older and required more food and clothing.

⁶⁵ For instance, when Luca da Panzano placed his two daughters in *serbanza* at the convent of San Baldassare near Coverciano in 1454, he paid an annual boarding fee of ten florins per girl, plus an additional florin to each of the two 'maestre che l'anno a insengniare'; Carte Stroziane, ser. 2, vol. 9, fol. 162^v.

income provided by boarders, the nuns of San Luca and similar institutions would have been forced to rely still more heavily on the commune and kin for subsidies. Different houses played the numbers game in different ways, depending on the nuns' talents and corporate traditions. The Benedictine nuns of Le Murate banked on their embroidery, the products of their scriptorium, and the practice of boarding older women as long-term annuitants, some of whom brought tremendous wealth and political leverage to the house.⁶⁶ The Augustinian nuns of Lapo ran a thriving convent school, while the Brigettines of the Paradiso made eyeglasses and figurines, and did other craftwork.⁶⁷

Beyond these immediate economic gains, however, *serbanza* figured as the leading edge of future patronage. Taking girls into custody maintained the economic viability of cash-poor convents in the short run, yet also provided a lifeline for a future endowment. *Serbanza* reinforced and complicated existing ties of kinship and patronage, helping to weave the great web of exchange in which convent and city were enmeshed. Longer tenures in particular enfolded nuns and laity in sustained, ongoing relationships of interdependence in which each world became critical to the continued vitality of the other.⁶⁸

Of course, the long-term relationships of *serbanza* could be a double-edged sword. Not all accounts were kept current, and several lapsed into serious arrears. The father of Maddalena Cambi owed the nuns of San Luca 126 florins – more than the equivalent of a full monastic dowry – for the nine years she boarded there (1519–28), during which time he did not pay a single florin. Similarly, Messer Antonio Canigiani boarded his daughter at San Luca for six years in a ten-year stint (1521–31) before paying anything toward her account. The nuns were willing to underwrite these unfavourable

⁶⁶ K. Lowe, 'Women's work at the Benedictine convent of Le Murate in Florence: Suora Battista Carducci's Roman missal of 1509', in J. Taylor and L. Smith (eds), *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence* (London, 1997), 133–46; *idem*, 'Female strategies for success in a male-ordered world: the Benedictine convent of Le Murate in Florence in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries', *Studies in Church History*, 27 (1990), 209–21; *idem*, 'Rainha D. Leonor of Portugal's patronage in Renaissance Florence and cultural exchange', in K. J. P. Lowe (ed.), *Cultural Links between Portugal and Italy in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 2000), 225–48. The convent chronicle by Suora Giustina Niccolini contains a list of laywomen who took the Benedictine habit at death and were buried in a special tomb reserved for them; BNF.II.II.509, fol. 22^v.

⁶⁷ On the Lapo school, see Strocchia, 'Learning the virtues'. I examine aspects of the monastic economy in my forthcoming book on Florentine convents.

⁶⁸ One example will have to stand for many. Kinship with one of the nuns provided an initial opening for the widow Bartolomea Manetti to place her daughters Diamante and Lucretia in convent care in 1517. Diamante remained in *serbanza* for six years (1517–23), while Lucretia stayed for only two (1517–19). Five years after her initial stint in custody, Lucretia returned to San Luca in *serbanza*, this time as a young married woman seeking monastic shelter for seven months. She flitted in and out of the convent from September 1524 until April 1525, when she left for an unspecified destination ('per andarne e non ritornare piu per starci'). Whether Lucretia's marriage to Masino Martelli was in trouble is not clear from the account; in any case, it was her widowed mother who brokered and paid for her care. Over the next twenty years Monna Bartolomea continued to patronize the convent, lending the nuns small sums of money and making modest contributions to their building campaign in 1547; Monastero di San Luca, vol. 1, fol. 17^v; vol. 2, fols 93^v, 117^v; vol. 12, fol. 103^v. The abbess of San Luca in 1524–5 was Suora Orsellina Martelli, kin to Lucretia's husband.

arrangements because of long-standing connections with the girls' families, who dulled the economic pain they inflicted by doing various favours, leveraging their influence with officials, and otherwise protecting the convent.⁶⁹ Other, more humble clients were not always so lucky. In 1491 the Benedictine nuns of Sant'Agata successfully sued Vaggio di Giovanni in the archbishop's court for the unpaid balance on a contract his father had made 'a long time ago' to place two daughters in custody.⁷⁰ These cases make clear that *serbanza* did not turn solely on economic issues, but also involved more political questions of sustaining social influence through networks of clientage.

Despite these positive features, however, convent guardianship also presented significant problems for monastic self-governance, since the presence and disparate tenures of boarders changed the ways nuns ordered their lives to varying degrees after 1480. As custodians of both boarders and novices, nuns negotiated serious tensions in the ways they groomed young girls, depending on their anticipated destiny as either secular brides or brides of Christ. Here religious women faced two intertwined challenges. On the one hand, nuns had to counterbalance the effect of secular girls on young nuns in training. Boarders might distort the moral formation of novices, who in most cases were close to their own age, by exposing them to their notorious playfulness, lack of discipline, release from monastic duties, and even their better, meat-filled diet.⁷¹ In some instances, boarders disrupted the tranquility of the house so severely that they had to be expelled, despite their attached income and patronage connections. In the 1470s the abbess of the Conventite, for example, sent home a young, difficult boarder for whom Ginevra de' Medici had secured a spot. As the abbess explained apologetically to her patron, 'with a thousand tongues, I could not tell you the craziness she brought here'.⁷² Another strong-willed boarder left San Luca after only one day (1465), saying she 'didn't want to stay in our convent'.⁷³ Even more normative cases of well-behaved girls disturbed convent routines and relationships, as boarders flitted in and out of the convent to vacation with their families, bringing back news and gossip. In addition, nuns managed class tensions and political differences between well-born novices and more socially mixed boarders, just as they juggled differences based on age, geographical origin, and life experience between boarders themselves.

⁶⁹ Monastero di San Luca, vol. 1, fol. 17; vol. 2, fol. 96; vol. 78, fols 92, 96, 137.

⁷⁰ Sant'Agata, vol. 47, fol. 105, dated 1491. Vaggio was obligated to pay seven and one-third florins to the nuns.

⁷¹ Marietta and Lucretia, daughters of the dyer Andrea di Domenico, entered San Luca in *serbanza* in August 1491, but their boarding agreement stipulated that they would eat the same fare as the nuns. The annual fee of sixteen florins per girl was paid 'per nostra faticha et spese de victo che solamente nbiamo a dare loro di nostro et insegnarle et costudirle'; Monastero di San Luca, vol. 29, fol. 52.

⁷² Quoted in S. Cohen, *The Evolution of Women's Asylums Since 1500: From Refuges for Battered Women to Shelters for Ex-Prostitutes* (New York, 1992), 68.

⁷³ Monastero di San Luca, vol. 29, fol. 97. Caterina d'Antonio Salvetti was placed in care on 5 July 1465 for a term of one year; 'partissi a di 6 di sopradetto non volendo istesse in casa nostra'.

By 1500 boarders were placing additional pressure not only on convent spaces, but also on the time and resources of nuns. Since each girl became the 'charge' (*discepola*) of an individual nun-mentor, boarders took nuns away from other monastic responsibilities, like the *opus dei* and rotation of offices, at precisely the same time that the growing number of novices required greater hands-on attention from the community. The demands placed on nuns' energies and patience must have been particularly heavy with extremely young boarders under the age of five who were not yet able to care for themselves. The snapshot of San Luca taken at Pazzi's visit illustrates aspects of this problem. The nuns nurtured six young girls, only two of whom were destined to replenish the community; the others might spend the better part of a decade or more in the nuns' care, but ultimately launched their own lives outside the walls. In short, the practice of *serbanza* set up a logistical competition between novices and boarders for nuns' time, energy, and resources. How the nuns allocated their love and labour revealed their perceived social roles and conditioned the tenor of collective life.

As boarding tenures grew longer, women's communities faced yet another challenge in socializing secular girls. The nuns of San Luca had to inculcate the moral training and disciplined deportment central to female education without dissuading their young charges from the attractions of secular life. In a round-the-clock setting geared toward the formation of religious, moral beings, in which environment played a critical role, nuns addressed the tasks not only of forming good nuns, but also of forming good wives. Convent guardianship presented nuns with the dual challenge of preserving the religious environment from corruption, while ensuring that secular girls did not take monastic ideals too seriously. Nuns had to keep secular girls secular, ready to perform their wifely duties and to take their place as status bearers of family reputation. In this task the nuns were aided by the annual vacations many boarders took that reasserted familial control and kept girls sufficiently attached to worldly goods. Admitting clusters of girls destined for marriage also reinforced their identity as part of a small, recognizable sub-group within the house who ate, drank, dressed, and talked differently than their monastic peers.⁷⁴

Above all, however, it was the very tenor of life at San Luca – the arrangements that gave the convent its supposed 'stench', such as open reclusion, vigorous ties with laity, loose clerical supervision – that paradoxically made

⁷⁴ For instance, in March 1526 the nuns of San Pier Maggiore incurred a number of special food expenses for 'le secolari'. In February 1529 they purchased fresh fish for 'le secolari che stanno in serbanza'. In January 1532 the nuns supplemented the diet of 'le fanciulle che sono in serbanza' with meat and parmesan, including extra amounts for the two sisters Lisa and Marietta Boncianni. The nuns also bought flasks of wine for the 'fanciulla' Maddelena de' Mozzi, whose boarding fees totalled the rather extravagant sum of thirty ducats per year from 1530 to 1532; San Pier Maggiore, vol. 82, fol. 160^v; vol. 84, fols 157^v, 297^v; vol. 86, fols 135^v, 137^v; vol. 170, fol. 19^v.

this house and others like it so well suited to meet these diverse challenges.⁷⁵ By contrast, Observant convents had few if any boarders; they did not welcome the intrusion, nor did elite families want to place secular girls in such a rigorous, impoverished environment.⁷⁶ Even well-born clerics like Messer Averano Giugni, cathedral canon and later convent procurator, appreciated these distinctions when he chose to board his two nieces at San Luca in 1508.⁷⁷ In boarding their young, Florentines generally favoured medium-sized communities of twenty to forty nuns that allowed for personalized attention to their girls, and rendered their own interventions more effective. Special approval went to those houses presenting a varied, protein-rich *mensa* that promoted girls' good health and reproductive potential.⁷⁸ The very values of elite households directed a steady stream of boarders into particular convent precincts for purposes of guardianship.

Besides managing problems of internal governance, convents like San Luca also had to contend with external challenges from ecclesiastical officials. By 1500 the problem of numbers, in the form of secular boarders, began to trouble the Florentine church hierarchy. Reformers had railed for decades about the corrosive commingling of secular and monastic worlds, but new ideals of enclosure gave these admonitions added force. Both the injunctions Pazzi issued during his 1509 pastoral rounds and the 1517 synodal decrees spearheaded by his successor, Giulio de' Medici, tried to implement more rigorous forms of passive enclosure that restricted contacts with laity. The 1517 decrees, which privileged issues of enclosure in the opening rubrics, stiffened controls around the traditional danger zones of the grate and service wheel (*ruota*), where worldly vanities entered most freely.⁷⁹ But these regulations addressed new issues as well. For the first time, Florentine synodal rulings monitored letters going in and out of convents, implicitly attesting to the high literacy levels of nuns, and limited family participation in nuns' consecration rites to enhance a religious focus. The 1517 synodal rulings also attempted to rid convents of the secular dangers in their midst

⁷⁵ Although the nuns paid a chaplain to recite mass every morning, they did not have a resident confessor. Instead they called on the services of clerics at the nearby hospital of Messer Bonifazio when needed, thus determining their own sacramental needs; AAV, VP.03.1, fasc. 2.

⁷⁶ For example, the convent of Sant'Anna, which followed a stringent version of the Benedictine rule, housed twenty nuns, 'e non tegnamo nessuna seculare'. The nuns were so poor that they could not support a full-time chaplain. Pazzi responded to their plight by granting them a forty-day indulgence; AAF, VP.03.1, fasc. 2.

⁷⁷ Monastero di San Luca, vol. 1, fol. 2^r.

⁷⁸ The early sixteenth-century account books of San Piero a Monticelli, for example, document the regular purchase of meat (veal, liver, sausage, lamb, poultry, pork, beef), fish, cheese, eggs, fruits, nuts, and vegetables for both nuns and seculars. Only on a few special feasts did the nuns eat a more restricted diet than their charges; San Piero a Monticelli, vol. 26, for the period 1513–27.

⁷⁹ J. D. Mansi, 'Concilium Florentinum Provinciale anno 1517', in *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence and Venice, 1759–98), vol. 35, cols 257–61. K. Gill offers a perceptive analysis of the problems surrounding enclosure in 'Scandala: controversies concerning *clausura* and women's religious communities in late medieval Italy', in S. L. Waugh and P. D. Diehl (eds), *Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, persecution, and rebellion, 1000–1500* (Cambridge, 1996), 177–203.

by barring any woman – widow, wife, or other secular girl, even if still a virgin – older than twelve from boarding in a convent, unless she intended to take the veil. By these means officials tried to prevent secular women and girls from disturbing the religious atmosphere of the house, ‘since the lute and the psalter do not harmonize well, and talk about marriage, children, and other worldly things easily corrupts the purity of the virgin heart’.⁸⁰

To some degree, Florentine clerics like Archbishop Giulio de’ Medici (later Pope Clement VII) accommodated the life-sustaining interactions between religious women, boarders, and their families and patrons. The synodal rubrics of 1517 permitted girls younger than twelve to board in convents without restriction, establishing in the process a critical signpost for women’s passage from chaste to nubile status. Secular women might speak to monastic friends at the grate without a formal licence as long as these laywomen were ‘of honest life and conversation’. Close male relatives could speak to nuns and boarders without veiling the grate, as was required for other male visitors, thus permitting visual as well as verbal contact across the monastic divide.⁸¹ From a strict reform perspective, however, these accommodations to lay values and practices only intensified the ‘stench’ afflicting San Luca and similar communities.

III

The practice of *serbanza* sketched here enlarges in several ways our perspective on the development of female custodial institutions, especially as they proliferated in both form and function during the sixteenth century. First, the experience of San Luca illuminates the deeply conflicting imperatives that monastic communities managed as both *de facto* custodial institutions and as self-supporting, self-governing religious groups. In a period of rapid social change and limited resources, the nuns of San Luca had to mediate between these claims in ways that ensured their own survival, while earning the grudging approval of clergy and the continued support of the laity, including civic officials. They did so with no particular civic mandate, such as those guiding the Innocenti or later grand-ducal institutions. Instead, San Luca and other communities like it cobbled together a set of enterprising strategies that were both lucrative and long-lasting, and which allowed them some degree of self-determination in addressing the problem of numbers.

Moreover, the strategies nuns developed in conjunction with boarding practices complicate our understanding of the evolution of women’s custodial institutions over time. Although later sixteenth-century institutions like

⁸⁰ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, vol. 35, col. 260. ‘Cum male conveniat cithara cum psalterio, et virginei cordi puritatem facile corrumpat sermo qui de nuptiis, de liberis, deque caeteris mundanae vitae cum sollicitudinibus, tum delectationibus habetur . . .’ My translation differs somewhat from the one published by Trexler, ‘Celibacy in the Renaissance’, 23.

⁸¹ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, vol. 35, cols 257, 260.

the Ceppo and the Fanciulle di Santa Caterina were based on monastic models, the very pluralism of Italian conventual experience authorized numerous arrangements and divergent values.⁸² Monastic prototypes provided not one but several templates for later, more specialized institutions devoted to women's care. At the same time, the evidence of *serbanza* at San Luca and similar convents throws into sharp relief how these hybridized institutions functioned as loci for particular, constructed kinds of female community. Mothers and daughters, patrons and clients, young and old, lay and religious were bound by a common set of circumstances, needs, and experiences, sometimes across lines of class or faction. As boarders, many women gained exposure to forms of corporate life and decision making generally denied them in secular life, which may have had long-term implications for their behaviour as pious advocates. Through these means, *serbanza* formed part of the institutional and experiential foundation of female culture in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Florence. The problem of numbers only intensified both the distinctiveness of this form of constructed community and its gendered nature.

Finally, the issues of order and governance raised by *serbanza* reveal an underlying concern with female socialization that has been overshadowed in Florentine historiography by the intense public discourse surrounding the grooming of boys in this volatile period. Embedded in the debate about female monasticism was a more subtle discourse about the proper upbringing of girls, which emerged into the public arena under Cosimo I. New political realities and social problems showcased questions of female guardianship as Cosimo and his successors reorganized the landscape of institutional charity and convent life. Yet in the final half-century of the republic, the practice of *serbanza* directed quiet attention toward the question of how to prepare female youth for the moving edge of their lives.

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⁸² Gill, 'Scandala', emphasizes the diversity and particularity of Italian conventual experience.